

DORMCON MINUTES - MARCH 17, 2011

Attendance:

Dorm	Representative	Absent
Baker	Brian Luque	
Burton-Conner	Alex Penn	
East Campus	James Douberley	
MacGregor	Kirsten Hessler (proxy for Mariya Samoylova)	
McCormick	Hannah Rice (proxy for Krithika Shanmugasundaram)	
New House	TyShaun Wynter	X
Next House	Alec Lai	
Random Hall	Rebecca Cox	
Senior Haus	Paula Countouris	
Simmons Hall	Zach Hynes	
Phoenix Group	Virginia Nicholson	
President	Christina Johnson	
Vice President	Meagan Roth	
Secretary	Alicia Singham Goodwin	
Treasurer	Leonid Grinberg	

Topics Discussed:

1. *Guest: Dean Henry Humphreys* - Kitchen Renovations

- When I arrived at MIT, I got a tour of all of the dorms, and what stood out was that the kitchens in the Cook for Yourself communities needed a lot of help. I need to make sure that the facilities that I'm providing you with are adequate.
- Appliances that are made for homes have shorter shelf lives at MIT, because they get a lot more use in the dorms.
- I'm here to solicit feedback. Beginning in June of next year, I will pick a dorm each summer to close down and renovate.
- Among the problems I've noticed is that there isn't proper ventilation, the stoves aren't commercial, and there isn't enough counter or storage space. I've heard that some dorms want dishwashers and some dorms want more garbage disposals, but some don't, and each dorm has different needs.
- We need to make a template for budgeting reasons, and then sit down together with the individual communities to elaborate on the template to
- We'll begin with "What needs to be in a kitchen", and then we'll work with architects, then bring it back to the students to make changes, then go back to architect

to price it, and then finally work on value engineering, one of my favorite processes (trying to make the budget and the project equal each other).

- I'm looking to you for a process. What is the best way to get student feedback now, and then how do we determine a representative body from which to solicit feedback in the future when we need to work with a smaller group or students to make the final decisions?
- We will chose the order of renovations based on which dorm has the most need for kitchen renovations.
- So, do you guys have any ideas or suggestions?
- *James:* You should definitely go to each specific dorm at the beginning. Also, I know that EC and probably most other dorms have a dining chair or a dining comm that you could talk to. East Campus would really like to keep our gas stoves, but I don't know what other dorms want in terms of stoves.
- *Response:* I also like cooking on gas, but that's not usually done in residence halls because of safety. But don't worry, I won't take away your gas stoves.
- *Humphreys:* I also think that Residential Life @ MIT was thinking about to increasing housekeeping in the dorms to keep the kitchens cleaner.
- *Robin:* About this template, how specific will it be and how much variation will there be between the final kitchen renovations in the different dorms?
- *Response:* There is nothing cookie cutter about MIT in general or about the dorms, so the template will make it easy for each dorm to get kitchens that fit their individual needs.
- *Paula:* The residents of the dorm that will be renovated last, a couple of years from now, might not agree with the template that students come up with this year. What will you do to make sure that the renovations stay current?
- *Response:* Like with any plan that comes out of my office, we will reevaluate about every 3 years and reinvestigate whether the plans we came up with are still relevant and applicable.
- *Paula:* I heard a rumor that some of the funds for renovating the kitchens is coming from summer housing. Is this true?
- *Response:* No, there is no truth to that.
- *Alec:* For the generic template, do you want input from the dining dorms too?
- *Response:* Yes, but maybe their kitchens would be on a different priority level than the Cook for Yourself dorms.
- *Leonid:* What about the fraternities? Would you also want input from them? What group do you see providing the student body that will help you make decisions?
- *Response:* That's an interesting question that has now been brought up a couple of times. We need to think about it more and try to decide how they might be involved in different aspects of the process.
- *Betsy:* Even though it would be nice to have a small representative group to help you make decisions, a potential concern is that the representatives will stop being representative.
- *Response:* Good point, I'll keep this in mind.

- *Humphreys*: I'd like to start this process before you all go away for the summer so that we can start making concrete plans in the fall. Thank you for your feedback.

2. *Guest: Chancellor Grimson* - Open Discussion

- *Introduction*: I recognize some from the UA, so I'll try to make this meeting briefer. I'll give you a quick introduction about myself, and I'd love to use tonight to talk strategy about how we can work together in the future. I grew up in a very small town in midwestern Minnesota. I came to MIT in 1975 as a graduate student. I spent this 1st term, perhaps like some of you, waiting for someone to tap me on the shoulder and tell me that admissions made a mistake, tell me that I shouldn't be here, but after a year I got used to everyone being smarter than me, and I got used to the work that I did at MIT. I joined the faculty 27 years ago. I love to teach undergraduate classes and introductory classes. I've served on a bunch of committees that deal with students, which is why it was such an easy decision for me to accept this position. This matters to me a lot. My plan is that I *do* intend to keep teaching. It is difficult with the schedule, and I also intend to keep advising (I have 24 advisees right now and I will add 6 freshmen in the fall). This relates to one of my priorities, so if i plan to do a reasonable job as chancellor, I need to know what makes students tick and so I need to keep in touch. It also guarantees that there are some hours in the day that I'm not in my office and I get a break from the phone calls and everything. Teaching is also a thing that I love. Here are my goals: 1- I need to listen. I'm on a listening tour. To be really direct, I don't think the right thing is to jump on one thing directly. I think something thats important is not just student leadership, but also listening to students in the different dorms. My hope is to come around regularly to student groups (I have already been to Panhel, IFC, and the UA). The 1st thing to say about this is that I'd like to float the idea that I'd like to arrange a venue to meet with "average" representative exceptional students. Why not do office hours? The people who come to office hours have a particular issue, and I'd really like to also meet with students that don't have an issue and just learn about them. I'd like to think about how we can repair some channels that might have been damaged in terms of communication, and best match you with the institutes resources.
- *Paula*: To really get a feel for dorm culture, you should go to the dorms at a time when the dorms are trying to show off their culture (for example, during CPW or REX).
- *Response*: Great idea, I'll definitely try to do that.
- *Leonid*: I'd like to know what you think *we* are doing wrong in terms of communication?
- *Response*: With no disrespect, I'm not sure that the people who were previously in these offices were coming around to student groups regularly enough. Part of what has caused us to slip is that some of our administrators forgot about that. One of the issues is that student government leadership changes over quickly, and then you get into a cycle that perpetuates a sense of distrust without any basis for that

distrust. I'm worried that someone from the administration will make a decision, and too many students are instantly in the mode of "its us against them", which is sometimes right and sometimes not, but doesn't lead to productive conversations.

- *Jacob*: How will you get information out to the students?
- *Response*: I'm really sensitive to spam. I don't want to get into a mode when you're like "ugh, e-mail from the chancellor". What would work? Is it the occasional e-mail? An add in the tech? An update on the MIT website?
- *Meagan*: I have a suggestion for if you're going to take the e-mail route. The way that you have talked today is really refreshing, and I think that if you keep the same laid back, honest tone, and don't make your e-mails too official sounding, people would be more likely to read them and be interested in the content.
- *Virginia*: I'm a big organizer of sports on campus, and I was really impressed and surprised and how helpful the administrators that I worked with were. It might be nice for students to see admins in different contexts. *Response*: One of the first things I did when I became chancellor was to go to the last home game of the MIT football team, and I really enjoyed myself.
- *Betsy*: I know that when we've had other administrators come to East Campus, there has been a huge turnout, and I think that its a really good way to get feedback.
- *Response*: I've gotten invited by multiple dorms, and told them that I'll get to them eventually, because I really would like to visit students in their dorms.
- *Robin*: I think its easy to tell when loud students don't like something. How can you tell if **the** students don't like something?
- *Response*: I would regularly look at what is called the "senior survey", which gets done every 2 years, and asks about academics, but I still need to find as many ways as I can to just be here to listen to students.
- *Paula*: There are a lot of opportunities for us to talk to people and express our concerns. After that, however, we often don't get to hear about the end result and how the administration decided to act. How would you fix that?
- *Response*: I absolutely agree that that is a problem. The problem is that many of the administrators, like me, are engineers, and we get into the bad habit that we see a problem, implement the solution, and forget to bring it full circle and go back to the students to tell them what the conclusion was. My comment to all of the 3 deans working under me was, when we make a decision, for them to ask "who else do I need to tell?"
- *Leonid*: A problem that I see is that different student groups have different interests. Maybe if there were a conflict between the dorms and the IFC, its not enough to just say that you listened to the students, because you would have to eventually choose one side or the other. How do you think that you would communicate that you did take something into account and still came up with an unpopular decision?
- *Response*: The most important thing I can do in that situation is to come back to you and explain exactly how we came to our decisions.

- *Josh*: A lot of the time, the problem with the feedback loop is that you get input, and then you get output 3 months later. Something that would be nice is to have intermediate feedback at more points during the decision making process.
- *Response*: Great point, I will try to do that.
- *Grimson*: I'll leave you with a story: President Hockfield told me that in my job, I will see lots of people bringing me their dead cats, asking to have their dead cat resurrected, which was a metaphor for people asking me to revisit old problems that have already been dealt with. What I ask of you is to please bring me your new problems, and I hope to work together with you to fix them. Thank you so much for having me today.

3. Defining DormCon and the Leadership Retreat

- *Brian*: First, I have an announcement. The deadline for Summer RA applications is March 31, so please encourage your residents to apply to be summer RAs at web.mit.edu/reslife/rlp/summerra.html
- *Brian*: Also, on April 2 we have a leadership retreat partially sponsored by DormCon, and we have space for a few people from each dorm, so if you know of freshmen from your dorm who might be interested, please encourage them to apply.
- I've talked to Meagan and Christina and the other exec members a lot, and I put a list together of different areas that we can focus on to redefine DormCon.
- **Event Support Funding**: We have excess money, and we need to talk about how to use it productively and how to prevent a similar problem in the future.
- **Advocacy**: What do we do now that we want to be doing and what could we do more of?
- **Website Communication**: How can we make the website more usable for all of DormCon?
- **REX**: How can DormCon support REX specifically? how do we "protect" REX?
- **House Taxes**: We need to come up with a system for house taxes, because the housing office goes through DormCon to find out how much to charge students for house taxes.
- What feedback do you guys have?
- *Betsy*: For the retreat, how will DormCon be involved? How do these goals relate to the retreat?
- *Brian*: The 1st half of the retreat will be skills development, and the 2nd half will be real applications of the skills we discuss. Since these goals are projects that DormCon needs to do anyways, the members of exec will be there to lead the freshmen in working on these projects.
- *Question*: Would the expectation be that the first year students on the retreat would continue working with DormCon?
- *Response*: There won't be a mandatory commitment, but my guess is that people will be invested in the project that they work on.
- *Betsy*: For the House Taxes, how is DormCon working with Bexley since they aren't members?

- *Brian:* It just came to my attention that the dorms don't have a unified procedure for determining or collecting house taxes, and there are discrepancies between what students are charged, what is decided on, and what is on the website. DormCon could restructure this system to make it more efficient. I don't know what Bexley does currently.
- *Leonid:* I'm interested in knowing where these projects that you've suggested came from?
- *Response:* Basically, they came from all of you, from stuff that I've heard at different meetings.
- *Leonid:* The UA has nom-comm, which is a good way to fill positions that represent students to the administration, but we don't have any similar system in place.
- *Christina:* There are spoken processes to determine things like that, but maybe in the future we might need to advocate for things like a nom-comm for DormCon.
- *James:* I'm not sure that I agree with all of these projects and goals that you've listed.
- *Brian:* These are a starting point, and we will continue to look at what we want our goals to be for the future.
- *Zach:* What are our next steps in this process?
- *Brian:* Anyone that is interested in helping reinvent DormCon's vision will stay after this meeting and we have a timeline for reporting our decisions back to DormCon.

4. Establishing a DormCon Budget Funding Requests

- Leonid proposed a budget that totaled about \$32,000, which is more ambitious than what DormCon has done in the past. However, we have a lot of money, and we do need to spend it eventually.
- *Question:* Do we have any idea of how much people actually spend vs. what they're budgeted when DormCon gives people funding?
- *Answer:* Typically, people spend a lot less than they can, but this definitely depends on the group.
- *Question:* Steer Roast has asked for just under \$10,000. Do we usually fund Steer Roast this much?
- *Answer:* Yes. Last year was the exception and Steer Roast didn't get funded by DormCon as much as usual, but 2 years ago we did give them \$10,000 and in the past its been similar.
- *Josh:* I'm a co-VP for Steer Roast this year, and I'm dealing with all of the money. This year, we have \$10,000 in the Senior House account and we have budgeted Steer Roast for \$20,000. We've requested \$8,000 from LEF but in the past we have not been successful in getting as much money from them as we've asked for. We're asking DormCon for more this year than we did last year because last year, Steer Roast wasn't open to the whole campus, but this year it will be. I'm happy to answer any questions you guys have.
- *Leonid:* What does it mean that Steer Roast will be open to the whole campus?

- *Answer:* This year we can have 100 MIT students register online each day, and 100 more people can randomly show up with MIT ID's. Since Senior Haus residents will still each get 4 guests this year, there is a large increase in the number of different MIT students that can come and participate than in the past.
- *Andy:* Will this done by a transfer or reimbursements?
- *Leonid:* Probably about half and half.
- **Discussion about whether/how to spend DormCon's reserves**
- First, what we need to do is decide how much money to spend this semester.
- It was suggested that we decide on what percentage of our budget to spend on different things, like events, CPW, and leadership development.
- Spending lots of money from our reserves this year could encourage dorms to come to us in the future for funding, because they would recognize that we have money to spend on events and other dorm-related things.
- However, we don't want to set a precedent by spending a lot of money this year, and then not having enough to fund events similarly in coming years.
- The money currently in the reserves isn't there because it was planned to be saved, it's there because of our past mistakes, so we need to find a way not to get into this situation again in the future.
- ***DormCon voted to cap the budget at \$25,000 for this semester***
- We then voted on all of the proposals that we had received before this meeting.
- ***East Campus's CPW request was approved (\$2,025)***
- ***Random Hall's CPW request was approved (\$1,650)***
- ***Senior Haus's CPW request was approved (\$350)***
- ***Baker's CPW request was approved (\$2,400)***
- ***MacGregor's CPW request was approved (\$1,200)***
- After all of those allocations (and all of the other projects and events we agreed to fund at previous meetings,), keeping in mind our \$25,000 cap, we still have about \$ 12,000 left.
- ***Steer Roast's funding request was approved in full (\$9,530)***
- By the next meeting, we need a full report on the budget for this term and the financial status of DormCon in general.